



Search and Rescue Model Operating Plan

**A Guide for State and Local
Government**

**Approved by the Standardized Emergency Management
System (SEMS) Advisory Board on July 28, 1999**

OPERATIONAL AREA SEARCH AND RESCUE (SAR) MODEL OPERATING PLAN

PURPOSE AND INTENT:

Pursuant to the Operational Area Search and Rescue Memorandum of Understanding between the _____ Fire and Rescue (F/R) Mutual Aid Coordinator and the _____ Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Coordinator, it is the intent of this Operating Plan to establish the operational details necessary to carry out the intent of the Memorandum.

DEPARTMENTAL COMMITMENTS:

Both departments agree that SAR resources are generally designed to access victims utilizing equipment and personnel transported by foot or unconventional vehicles. SAR's strengths are in its ability to reach and operate in locations remote from vehicular access and in its members' personal self-sufficiency – even during prolonged operational periods in dangerous weather. F/R resources are generally designed to be truck-based. F/R's strengths are in its rapid deployment and availability of heavy rescue and fire suppression equipment.

Both departments further agree that each incident may require the services of both agencies, and agree to utilize, as prescribed by SEMS, ICS Unified Command or a Liaison Officer/Agency Representative at a single Incident Command Post, as mandated by the Cooperative Agreement.

TERMS:

Basic Rope Rescue - Rescue operations of a non-complex nature employing the use of ropes and accessory equipment usually limited to simple raising and lowering.

Cave Rescue – Rescue operations in a naturally occurring subterranean chamber.

Confined Space Rescue - Rescue operations in an enclosed area, with limited access, not designed for human occupancy, possessing potential for physical injury, usually in an urban, agricultural or industrial setting.

Dive Rescue – An underwater operation carried out by rescuers utilizing underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA, surface-supplied air, re-breathers, etc.).

F/R - (Fire/Rescue, includes Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) - under authority of the fire department). Responsible for rescue of victims from locations that are reasonably accessible from roadways as well as for locating and rescuing victims of structure collapse, construction cave-ins, trench, confined space, high angle, and similar accidents

and disasters. Includes responses classified as “Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health” (IDLH). May also include water rescues (ocean, swift water, flood).

Flood Rescue – A rescue during an inundation in which water current is not an operational or safety factor.

‘Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health’ (IDLH) Incidents – A rescue operation in which a poisonous/dangerous atmosphere exists or is suspected, usually involving hazardous materials.

Mine Rescue – Rescue operations conducted in a man-made excavation that is usually not recently constructed and in which collapse and poisonous atmosphere is of concern.

Ocean/Surf Rescue – A water rescue in which ocean surf or current is an operational and/or safety factor. A significant consideration is the high percentage of ocean/surf fatalities that are rescuers.

Off-Highway Rescue - The incident scene is not easily accessible from highways or roads suitable for vehicular traffic.

SAR - Search and Rescue (SAR), under authority of the county sheriff. Responsible for locating, accessing, stabilizing, and transporting victims in/from locations that are not reasonably accessible from roadways. May include water rescues (ocean, swift water, flood).

Swift Water Rescue – A water rescue in which water current is an operational and/or safety factor. A significant consideration is the high percentage of swift water fatalities that are rescuers.

Technical Rope Rescue - Rescue operations of a technically complex nature employing the use of ropes and accessory equipment, generally utilizing techniques beyond simple raising and lowering, such as “high-lines,” etc.

INCIDENT RESPONSE MATRIX: Even though the majority of incidents are multi-jurisdictional, generally either the SAR or the F/R team is best qualified on the hazards of a specific incident. It is not practical to classify every possible type of incident, however, the most likely types of incidents are classified below. This matrix may also be used to assist in determining which agency would be the most appropriate to respond to an unclassified incident.

TYPE	AGENCY	SELECTION CRITERIA
CAVE RESCUE	SAR	Requires specialized team; usually a SAR resource.
CONFINED SPACE RESCUE	F/R	Training/equipment specific to F/R.
CRIMINAL ACTS; AND RESULTING INCIDENTS	REQUIRES LAW NOTIFICATION	Lead rescue agency depends on nature and location of incident, however, law enforcement must be notified to facilitate concurrent criminal investigation.
DISASTER SCENE SIZEUP	SAR / F/R	In the initial stages of a disaster, both agencies may be required to determine the type and extent of rescue necessary.
DIVE RESCUE (NEAR DROWNINGS)	SAR / F/R	Nearby Dive Rescue resources from both agencies should respond, if available. Quick response is critical.
DOWNED COMMERCIAL AIRCRAFT	SAR / F/R	Combined response because of requirements for rescue, EMS, investigation, evidence preservation, site security, morgue details.
DOWNED LIGHT AIRCRAFT, ACCESSIBLE BY VEHICLE	F/R	Accessibility reduces time and resource load.
DOWNED LIGHT AIRCRAFT, NOT ACCESSIBLE BY VEHICLE	SAR/ F/R	Unlikely to have large number of victims, and may be time and resource intensive.
FLOOD RESCUE	SAR / F/R	Both SAR and F/R should respond if properly trained and equipped.

TYPE	LEAD AGENCY	SELECTION CRITERIA
INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT, CHEMICAL SPILL, OR TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENT (INCLUDES MOST 'IDLH' INCIDENTS; ALSO SEE MINE RESCUE)	F/R	Training and equipment specific to F/R.
MINE RESCUE	SAR / F/R	Usually in rural or remote locations; requires specially trained and equipped team.
OCEAN / SURF RESCUE	SAR / F/R	Quickest available resource should respond. Emphasis is on keeping rescuers not properly trained and equipped out of the water.
OFF-HIGHWAY RESCUE, KNOWN LOCATION, LONG DURATION	SAR	Time and resource intensive.
OFF-HIGHWAY RESCUE, KNOWN LOCATION, SHORT DURATION	SAR / F/R	Depends on accessibility from roadway.
OFF-HIGHWAY SEARCH OR RECOVERY, UNKNOWN LOCATION	SAR	Time and resource intensive.
STRUCTURE COLLAPSE	F/R	Training specific. SAR may be utilized in support role.
SWIFTWATER RESCUE	SAR / F/R	Quickest available resource should respond. Emphasis is on keeping rescuers not properly trained and equipped out of the water.
TRENCH RESCUE	F/R	Similar to confined space rescue. Training specific.

INCIDENT PROTOCOLS: The first agency to arrive on scene should immediately assess the situation. If the incident requires specialized skills, equipment, or training not possessed by the initial agency, the agency classified for that type of incident should be notified, including all pertinent information. Whenever either agency is notified of a SAR or a F/R incident that does not fall under their classification, they will immediately notify the other agency, in addition to any other appropriate agency.

This agreement does not prevent an agency from responding to an incident that is not in their primary classification in order to act in a support role, or be on standby.

The protocols for each type of incident are discussed in more detail below.

Cave Rescue: This type of incident will be handled by SAR unless the scene is in an urban area, the victim is quickly accessible, and a F/R team can respond more rapidly.

Confined Space Rescue: See Trench Rescue.

Criminal Acts, Incidents Resulting From: Regardless of whether F/R or SAR resources are utilized for an incident, the law enforcement having jurisdiction will be notified immediately of any incident that is suspected to have been caused by a criminal act. Law enforcement will conduct their investigation in cooperation with the life saving efforts of SAR or F/R teams.

Dive Rescue (Near Drowning): Because successful rescue of near-drowning victims hinges on quick response, recovery, and resuscitation, both agencies (assuming both have Dive Rescue resources) should be immediately notified.

Downed Aircraft Incidents: Because the Search and Rescue team has specialized equipment used for the location of downed airplanes, SAR will be immediately notified in situations where the aircraft's location is unknown or not easily accessible.

Downed Light Aircraft Accessible By Vehicle are best served by F/R because the location of the incident is known, F/R can usually respond more rapidly, and because large specialized equipment and fire suppression capabilities would be in the best interest of the victims. Law enforcement will be notified in the event of a downed aircraft because they may be needed for a support role, site security, evidence preservation, investigation or morgue.

Downed Light Aircraft Not Accessible By Vehicle are best served by the SAR teams. The technical skills of the SAR team will probably be required, especially in isolated areas. F/R may be notified of a downed plane that is not accessible by road, when they may have a supporting role, or have a need to provide EMS or fire suppression.

Downed Commercial Aircraft, regardless of the location, will likely require the combined efforts of all local emergency response agencies. Both SAR and F/R teams should be activated. F/R may be deployed to search, extricate, triage, treat, and transport. SAR may be utilized to search for victims thrown or scattered from the wreckage, in

addition to the recovery of bodies. Additionally, triage and morgue areas may require large numbers of personnel. Law enforcement will be notified for: traffic control, site security, evidence preservation, investigation and/or morgue.

Flood Rescue: Each agency will respond and request response of the other agency to these incidents, unless the incident involves a safe, simple, and quick rescue. The purpose for dispatching both agencies on a flood rescue is to allow as many units as possible to be deployed for searching the entire area as quickly as possible and to perform multiple simultaneous rescues. A unified command should be established if both teams are to be operational on the same incident at the same time. The priority is to rescue the victim as soon as possible without endangering law enforcement and fire personnel.

Industrial Accident, Chemical Spill, Or Transportation Accident: The primary agency for these types of IDLH incidents has historically been F/R. Because F/R is attached to the _____ Fire Department, which has the required HAZMAT training and equipment, F/R will be the lead agency in searches and rescues in these areas. A possible exception is Mine Rescue (see below).

Mine Rescue: Mineshafts present unique hazards and rescues should not be attempted by teams not specifically trained and equipped to work in mineshafts. In addition to presenting an IDLH environment, mineshafts also present a cave-in risk. Since most mineshafts are in rural or even remote locations, SAR will usually be the lead agency for mineshaft operations. However, actual entry of mineshafts must involve a specialized team that may be part of SAR, F/R, or some mutual aid entity.

Ocean / Surf Rescue: Both agencies will be notified and the ocean / surf rescue team from the involved political jurisdiction with the quickest response time will generally establish initial incident command. A unified command should be established if both teams are to be operational on the same incident at the same time. The priority is to rescue the victim as soon as possible without endangering law enforcement and fire personnel who are not specifically trained and equipped for ocean / surf rescue operations. Both F/R and SAR ocean / surf rescue teams may be utilized in support of each other when necessary and appropriate.

Off-Highway Rescue, Known Location: Accessibility from a roadway is the key issue. Most SAR teams cannot mobilize immediately while most F/R resources are not trained and equipped to operate far from their vehicles, especially in rough terrain and/or inclement weather.

Short Duration operations that can be accomplished efficiently without jeopardizing the safety of F/R personnel will benefit from the rapid response of those resources. If factors such as dangerous terrain or inclement weather pose a significant hazard to rescuers, SAR should be notified.

Long Duration operations that require lengthy access by foot or specialized off-road vehicles are best handled by SAR resources.

Regardless of the incident classification, if mutual assistance from the other agency would improve the situation, notification and response will be made. Because the primary goal is the well being of the victim, interagency cooperation is paramount.

Off-Highway Search Or Recovery, Unknown Location: When the location of the victim is unknown and the area to be searched is not on or adjacent to streets or roadways, SAR resources are best suited to conduct the operation and will be notified.

Structure Collapse: Collapsed Structures may occur as a result of natural events, inherent defects, or criminal acts. This type of incident is classified as a F/R response because of the confined space training required. SAR may be notified to supply search dog teams and searches in non-critical areas.

Swift Water Rescue: Both agencies will be notified and the swift water team from the involved political jurisdiction with the quickest response time will generally establish initial incident command. A unified command should be established if both teams are to be operational on the same incident at the same time. The priority is to rescue the victim as soon as possible without endangering law enforcement and fire personnel who are not specifically trained and equipped for swift water rescue operations. Both F/R and SAR swift water teams may be utilized in support of each other when necessary and appropriate.

Trench Rescue And Other Confined Space Rescues: Similar to Structure Collapse; F/R has primary responsibility. SAR may be notified if their resources are necessary for the particular incident.

ADDITIONAL PLAN COMPONENTS: The signatories to this Operating Plan each agree to develop the following additional components based on local needs and resources:

**Dispatch Protocols and Communication Links
Response Maps, Response Standards, Cooperative Training
Types and Locations of Agency-Specific Equipment**

OPERATING PLAN APPROVED BY:

Law Enforcement representative
Date:

Fire and Rescue representative
Date: